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Resource Sovereignities in Bolivia: Re-Conceptualising the Relationship between Indigenous Identities and the Environment during the TIPNIS Conflict

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Abstract

This paper examines the active re-construction of indigenous identities within the Plurinational State of Bolivia through the case study of a resource conflict that arose with the government's announcement of its intention to build a road through a national park and indigenous territory, the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré (TIPNIS; Indigenous Territory and Isiboro Sécuré National Park). Ethnographic fieldwork shows that *both* the state *and* the lowland indigenous movement have fashioned essentialised understandings of an indigenous identity linked to the environment in order to legitimise competing resource sovereignty claims.

Keywords: Bolivia, environment, identity, indigenous, plurination, resource sovereignty.

In Latin America, a post-neoliberal trend has emerged that could be said to constitute '21st century socialism' (Kennemore and Weeks, 2011: 267). Nonetheless, for Bolivians this shift has not resulted in significant movement away from an economic model based on the exploitation of natural resources. Rather than being post-extractivist, social ecologist Eduardo Gudynas argues that the government of Evo Morales advances a type of *neoextractivismo progresista* (progressive neo-extractivism) that gains popular support by nationalising extractive industries and redistributing State revenues (Gudynas, 2012: 132). However, this model of national development reifies understandings of progress based on the colonial domination of nature and negates alternative understandings of territoriality, governance and development postulated by many indigenous peoples. A number of scholars have addressed examples of resource struggles in Bolivia and argued that the extraction of non-renewable resources alongside major infrastructural projects comes at the expense of indigenous territorial rights and environmental sustainability (Humphreys Bebbington and Bebbington, 2012; Perreault, 2012; Stefanoni, 2012; Hindery, 2013).

Contrasting ideas of territoriality, democracy and progress manifested during a conflict that erupted in 2011 over the Bolivian government's plans to build a road through the Isiboro Sécore Indigenous Territory and National Park, known more commonly as the TIPNIS (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore). The lowland indigenous organisation Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB; Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia) protested the plans in an historic march to the capital city of La Paz, where they were greeted by tens of thousands of supporters. People arriving on the capital's streets revealed exasperation over the apparent contradictions within the discourse of the Movimiento al Socialismo Party (MAS; Movement Towards Socialism) supporting environmental and indigenous rights alongside a neo-extractivist development model. This pressure forced the government's annulment of the project on 24 October 2011, under Ley No. 180.

In the first section of the article I discuss the antecedents of the MAS Party in order to contextualise the current TIPNIS conflict. I then outline the background of CIDOB to demonstrate the importance of cultural politics in resource struggles and demands for indigenous territoriality, before outlining the ethnographic methodology used in this study. The final and main section analyses the empirical findings to evaluate the 'legitimacy politics' (Andolina, 2003: 725) surrounding different and competing resource sovereignty demands. I adopt social anthropologist John-Andrew McNeish's definition of resource sovereignties as 'inter-connecting understandings of territoriality, identity, rights, use and nature' (McNeish, 2011: 20). The TIPNIS conflict illuminates the following three political discourses: (a) government claims for resource nationalism; (b) CIDOB's demands for indigenous territoriality; and (c) articulations of *soberanía popular del pueblo* (popular sovereignty of the people). I conclude by arguing that the coupling of essentialised articulations of indigeneity with identities of the 'ecologically noble savage' (Redford, 1991: 24) has served to further the public claims-making of both the Bolivian government and CIDOB, marking a new era in Bolivian politics.

The TIPNIS Conflict and the Declining Legitimacy of the MAS

The MAS Party, organised as a 'party of social movements', came to presidential office in 2006 with the express goal of acting as a political instrument for the sovereignty of the people (Dangl, 2010: 9). The rise of the MAS was made possible through the power of social movements headed

by Evo Morales, the well-known peasant-indigenous leader of the coca-growing union (Webber, 2011). The foundations for this development were laid during the insurrectionary cycle of 2000–2005 when the ‘Water and Gas Wars’ managed to overthrow two presidents and oust a transnational corporation in an upsurge of popular resistance to neoliberal hegemony (Kohl and Farthing, 2006). One of the key components of these resource conflicts was the demand for popular sovereignty and the recovery of Bolivian ownership and control of natural resources (Haarstad, 2009). The term ‘sovereignty’ has been central to the MAS who have married broadly felt anti-neoliberal sentiments with an expansive language of indigeneity in order to gain popular support (Albro, 2005). The project of the MAS has been marked by an ability to cross-cut class and ethnic identities and subsume heterogeneous identities under an ‘indigenous nationalism’ (Stefanoni, 2006: 37).

A core agenda of the MAS has been the transformation of the Republic into the Plurinational State of Bolivia, ratified in the new 2009 Constitution. Plurinationalism can be defined as ‘a state that merges constitutive sovereignty rooted in the national people (*pueblo*) and indigenous plurality and self-determination’ (Gustafson, 2009: 987). On the one hand, national sovereignty has been shaped by a number of nationalisations. Most notable is the nationalisation of the hydrocarbons industry announced in Decree 28701 on 1 May 2006. The introduction to the decree states that nationalisation will ‘reclaim our natural riches as a fundamental base to recuperate our sovereignty’ (cited in Haarstad, 2009: 178). On the other hand, indigenous plurality has been recognised and territorial rights granted under the new Constitution that names 36 national ethnic languages alongside Spanish. The Constitution offers unprecedented indigenous rights, such as territorial self-determination and autonomy (Art. 2) and recognises indigenous groups’ cultures and world-visions, as well as their political, legal and economic structures (Art. 30). Furthermore, Article 30 guarantees prior consultation in regard to the exploitation of non-renewable resources within indigenous territories (Asamblea Constituyente, 2008).

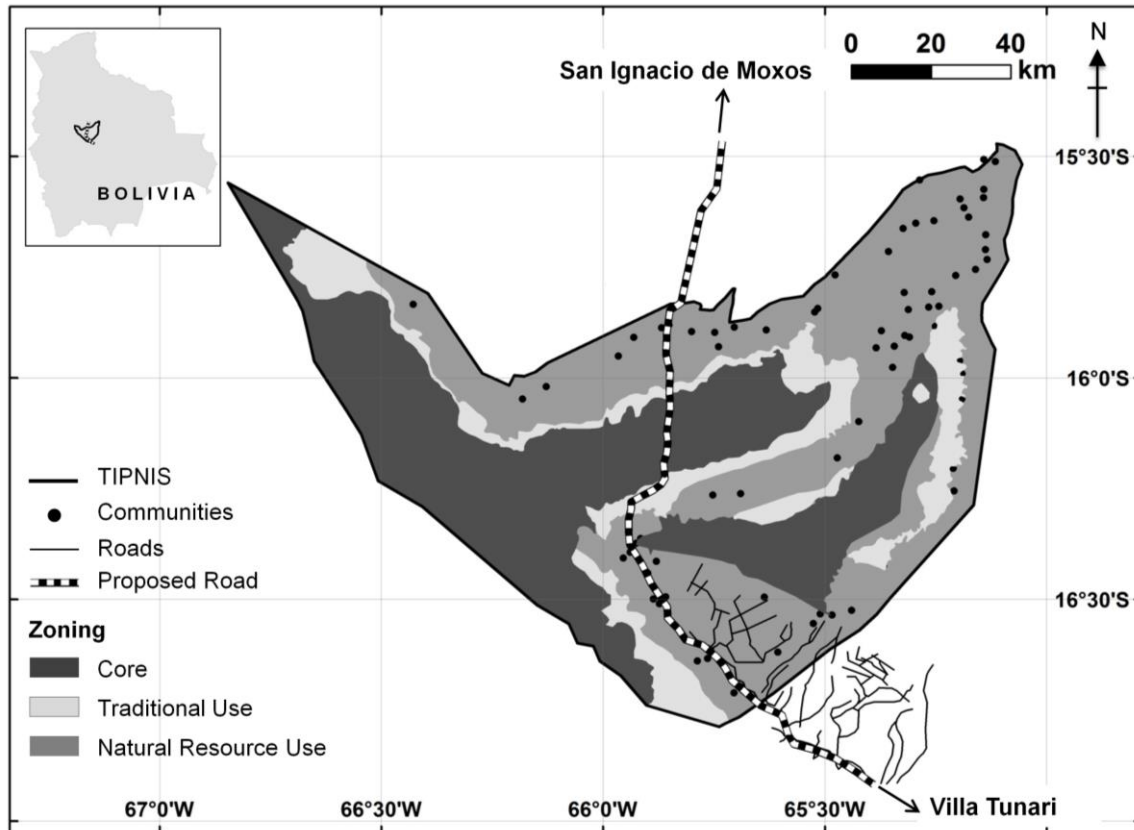
However, as Morales comes to the end of his second term of office and prepares to face the 2014 presidential elections, tensions are running high over the perceived failures or contradictions of the MAS project. In particular, debates have arisen over interpretations of development, environmental governance and resource management leading to land and resource sovereignty

conflicts, the principle example being the proposal to create a road through the TIPNIS (Figure 1). Although the government argued that the project is necessary to integrate Bolivia's eastern and western regions, the fact that the proposed road would cut through the heart of the national park hints at hidden agendas. Three broad motives have been suggested (cf. McNeish, 2013). First, the *cocaleros* (coca growers) want greater access to the park to expand cultivation. Second, the road is part of the Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure in South America), for an inter-oceanic highway to provide Brazil with better access to markets in China (FOBOMADE, 2011). Third, the road provides better access for the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons. The Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario (CEDLA; Centre for the Study of Labour and Agrarian Development), has discovered that hydrocarbon exploration concessions have been granted to 25.5 percent of the area of the TIPNIS, with 17.7 percent granted to a single enterprise: YPFB Petroandina SAM, a joint enterprise of the national oil company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales de Bolivia (YPFB; Bolivian State Oil Fields), and Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA; Petroleum of Venezuela) established in 2008, during the Morales administration (CEDLA, 2012). It is therefore evident that the road is intimately tied in to the MAS's economic model based on the appropriation of land and natural resources.

The TIPNIS carries a dual status as an important protected zone of national importance (designated a national park under Supreme Decree 7401 in 1965) and as a territory that is home to the Yuracaré, Chimane and Mojeño-Trinitario indigenous peoples. The project has contradicted government legislation on two fronts. First, the government have ignored concerns raised in the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment prepared in 2011 by the Servicio Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (SERNAP; National Service of Protected Areas) (SERNAP – Rumbol, 2011). Moreover, the route of the proposed road cuts through the Core Zone of the park as defined in the management plan formulated by SERNAP and the indigenous communities of the TIPNIS (Figure 1). The Core Zone is an area of high biodiversity where any type of commercial exploitation of natural resources is prohibited as well as 'any activity or infrastructure that alters or modifies habitats (e.g. construction of infrastructure, hydrocarbon exploitation)' (SERNAP, 2005: 106). Second, the government did not fulfil the obligatory prior consultation process, having signed the contract to secure financing from the Banco Nacional de Desarrollo Económico y Social (BNDES; Social Brazilian Development Bank) on 15 February

2011 without adequate consultation with TIPNIS communities. This is part of a broader trend in Latin American countries such as Peru and Ecuador ‘that translates into replays of long histories of colonialism, of violent incorporation of peripheries, and of resource dependence’ (Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington, 2011: 142).

Figure 1. Route of the Proposed Road through the TIPNIS.



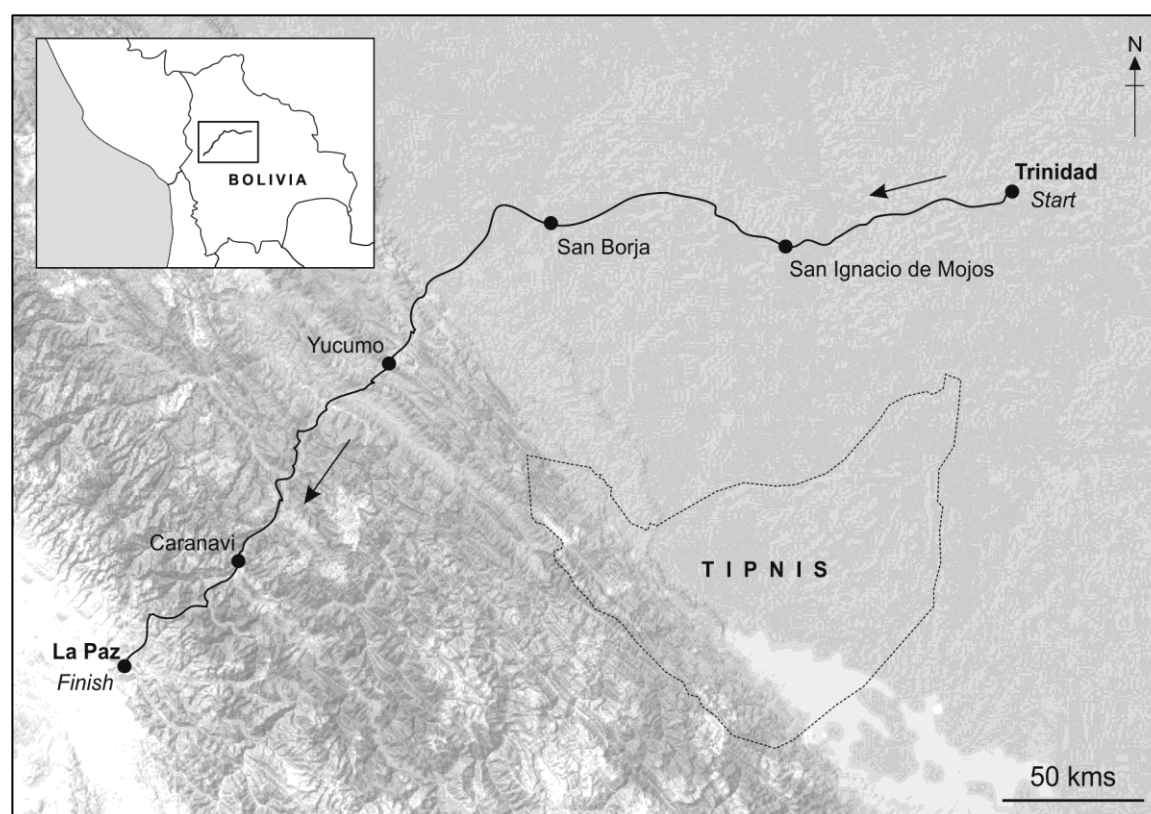
Source: Created by Andrew Singleton (School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow) for this research project based on public data from SERNAP (2005)

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the original indigenous victory of the march was later undermined. On 10 February 2012 the government announced Ley No. 222, placing the road project back on the agenda. This forced CIDOB to set out on another protest march in late April 2012, which I shall discuss in the empirical section of the article.

Politics of Indigeneity in the Lowland Indigenous Movement

CIDOB has been at the forefront of organising opposition to the road project. The umbrella organisation was founded in 1982 and now represents the 34 indigenous nations of the Amazon Basin and Chaco (Yashar, 2005; Postero, 2007a). CIDOB united diverse ethnic communities in a political project for the legal protection of indigenous lands in the face of increasing colonisation through farming, logging, coca growing and the exploitation of hydrocarbons. These demands revolved around the concept of *territorio* (territory), which ‘became an icon of indigenous-state relations’ (Postero, 2007a: 49).

Figure 2. Route of the Indigenous Marches in Defence of the TIPNIS.



Source: Created by Les Hill (School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow) for this research project

In 1990, CIDOB set out on an indigenous march from the Amazonian city of Trinidad to the highland capital of La Paz, designated the march for *el territorio y la dignidad* (territory and dignity). This march led to three executive decrees (22609, 22610 and 22611) that gave legal recognition to indigenous territories, including the TIPNIS (Jones, 1990: 5). Since 1990 a further eight marches have been organised to demand further rights to territory, self-determination and

autonomy. The marches in defence of the TIPNIS are the eighth and ninth of their kind and follow the route of the historic 1990 march, around 600 km in distance (Figure 2).

CIDOB arose in a global climate of ‘indigenism’ that sought to recognise indigenous rights under international frameworks such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 169, ratified by Bolivia in 1991, and the later United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 (Brysk, 2000; Canessa, 2006). Both recognise the right for indigenous peoples to be consulted in decision-making on development proposals. CIDOB has additionally shaped and been shaped by a multicultural turn that led to reforms of the state during the 1990s to accommodate indigenous demands and recognise the multiethnic nature of Latin American societies (Van Cott, 2000; Sieder, 2002). In 1994, the reorientation of the political landscape due to international rights legislation and ethnic demands prompted a change in the Constitution to declare Bolivia a ‘multiethnic and pluricultural’ nation. Moreover, neoliberal reform measures decentralised government institutions through the 1994 Ley de Participación Popular (Law of Popular Participation). As well as providing greater autonomy to municipal institutions, the Ley provided a means of indigenous political representation through Organizaciones Territoriales de Base (Grassroots Territorial Organisations) (Kohl, 2002; Regalsky, 2010). Furthermore, in 1996 an agrarian reform law granted legal collective land titles to what are known as TCOs (Tierra Comunitaria de Origen; Original Communal Land) (Postero, 2007a).

However, Yashar has argued that the neoliberal frameworks of multiculturalism resulted in ‘the penetration of the state into the Amazon’ having ‘challenged indigenous territorial autonomy that had previously survived in the absence of a historically viable state’ (Yashar, 2005: 153). The failure of neoliberal reforms to grant adequate recognition of local autonomous forms and self-determination has resulted in increasing demands by CIDOB for participation, through their own organisational bodies, in the political, social, economic and cultural decisions taken in the country thereby ‘rethinking the homogenizing and liberal precepts of contemporary citizenship regimes and the state’ (Yashar, 2005: 285). In the TIPNIS conflict, CIDOB has demanded the government’s practical application of plurinationalism to incorporate plural understandings of development, democracy and resource management.

During the TIPNIS conflict several of CIDOB’s political objectives have relied on the

legitimation of indigenous identity claims through, for example, assumptions that indigenous people have a unique relationship to nature. In his 1991 article 'The Ecologically Noble Savage', Redford argued that scientists and advocates of indigenous rights during the 1980s revived notions of the idealised 'noble savage', this time with a distinctly ecological quality. McNeish (2013) argues that this association remains prevalent within intellectual assessments and media attention surrounding the TIPNIS controversy, despite the fact that academic literature, especially within anthropology, has contested the suggestion that there is an intrinsic relationship between indigenous peoples and nature (cf. Diamond, 1986; Colchester, 1994; Krech, 1999). McNeish asserts that these simplifications are dangerous as they ignore the fact that the indigenous peoples of the lowlands are involved in processes of resource extraction, globalisation and development. McNeish's cautionary reminder is key to critical assessments of indigenous eco-politics. Nevertheless, it is important to contextualise indigenous identity claims within the broader climate of contemporary state-indigenous relations. Doing so reveals a new dynamic in indigenous politics, namely that for the first time in Bolivian history the government is also engaged in indigenous eco-politics in order to justify its own brand of resource nationalism. Thus, lowland indigenous identities are not formed in a political vacuum but counteract government projects of extractive development that jeopardise the livelihoods of indigenous peoples within communally titled territories.

Here, I examine how the strategic use of indigenous essentialism authenticates and makes legitimate different resource sovereignty claims. These articulations are part of a wider 'cultural politics' (Alvarez et al., 1998: 7). This involves '*call and response* interactions, where political communities contest and negotiate ideas that legitimate the political regime and political interests' (Andolina, 2003: 725; original emphasis). Indeed, comprehending resource conflicts requires an approach that integrates politico-cultural understandings that entangle 'meanings of development, citizenship and the nation itself' (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010: 697). The performance of an identity narrative is intimately connected to other forms of identity construction, such as those mobilised by the state. In the case study of the TIPNIS conflict these interactions take place through 'languages of contention' (Roseberry, 1996: 83) that circulate around concepts such as *vivir bien* (living well), *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), *soberanía nacional* (national sovereignty), *territorio indígena* (indigenous territory), *casa grande* (big house) and *soberanía popular del pueblo* (popular sovereignty of the people).

Ethnographic Methodology

This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork with the lowland indigenous movement and urban solidarity campaigns during the TIPNIS conflict in order to understand the politics of representation and the internal dynamics and tensions of re-constructed identity-making. Ethnography was chosen as the method best able to describe the lived, subjective experiences of marginalisation, the construction of collective grievances and the formation of resistance from below. I also include an analytical treatment of government discourses taken from documentary sources in order to contextualise the narratives articulated by CIDOB.

The nine-month research period in Bolivia was undertaken between September 2011 and June 2012 using three methods. First, participant observation was initially carried out with the urban solidarity movement La Campaña en Defensa del TIPNIS (Campaign in Defence of the TIPNIS), based in Cochabamba. My involvement led to connections with movements in La Paz and Santa Cruz, as well as attendance at CIDOB meetings and events. These relationships led to my participation in the Eighth Indigenous March for two days on the descent into La Paz and on the Ninth Indigenous March for a total of six weeks, during which I walked, camped, cooked and lived alongside the indigenous participants. Second, I conducted 55 semi-structured in-depth interviews in Spanish (the lingua franca of the lowland indigenous movement) with indigenous leaders, protest marchers, NGO workers and urban solidarity activists. In this article I use the real names of well-known representatives, but omit other names to protect confidentiality. Third, documentary analysis of material gathered throughout the conflict was carried out in order to capture official narratives, as well as personal accounts and discussions. These documents included public announcements from the indigenous marches and CIDOB, urban campaign literature and articles from newspapers and from web-based media. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from non-English texts or interviews are my own.

Resource Sovereignties: Between the *Pachamama* and the *Casa Grande*

Contrasting resource sovereignties were identified during the TIPNIS conflict. On the one hand, the Bolivian government has reified an essentialised Aymaran identity based on concepts such as *vivir bien* and *Pachamama* in order to justify a state-led model of resource nationalism. On the

other, the indigenous movement of the lowlands has fashioned demands for indigenous territoriality through notions of ecological sustainability. Both identities performed act to legitimise competing resource sovereignties by building connections with other sectors of the Bolivian population. However, this is a contentious process as both claims rub up against the demand for *soberanía popular del pueblo* pursued by movements on the political ‘Left’. This idea postulates that the ownership and governance of natural resources should be in the hands of the people and therefore questions the exclusionary nature of indigenous territoriality as well as the centralised decision-making being pursued by the MAS Party. The next sections discuss these competing resource sovereignties in turn.

Resource Nationalism of the State: Pachamama and Vivir Bien

The Morales administration has legitimised state-led resource nationalism through a popular discourse and imaginary arguing that capitalism is incompatible with environmental sustainability. This effectively amalgamates the notion of an environmentally sustainable model of development with indigenous identities through conceptualisations of the *Pachamama* and *vivir bien*, the Spanish name given to the Aymara worldview of *suma qamaña* (Gudynas, 2011). *Vivir bien* (more popularly known as *buen vivir* in Ecuador) describes a ‘system of knowledge and living based on the communion of humans and nature and on the spatial-temporal-harmonious totality of existence’ (Walsh, 2010: 18). Gudynas argues that this perspective collapses the ‘classical Western dualism that separates society from Nature’ (2011: 444). However, both Gudynas (2011) and Walsh (2010) point out that the concept has been transformed across the Andean region to inform development narratives.

State-led resource nationalism gains significant legitimacy based on popular sentiment that seeks national sovereignty over extractive industries, i.e. external to transnational corporations (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010). Postero has described this as ‘a national sovereignty free from the strictures that U.S. imperialism and neoliberal capitalism imposed’ (Postero, 2010: 24). David Choquehuanca, the Bolivian Minister of Foreign Affairs, has argued that the concept of *vivir bien* exists in contra-distinction to capitalism and the related concept of *vivir mejor* (living better). He describes the Andean world-vision as an ecologically balanced and culturally sensitive form of future development ‘to reclaim our life in complete harmony and mutual respect with mother

nature, with Pachamama [...] where we are all part of nature and there is nothing separate' (Choquehuanca, 2010: 452).

Morales has utilised these notions at an international level to critique discourses surrounding climate change policy. Bolivia was one of five countries that opposed the Copenhagen Accord at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2009, arguing that the main cause of climate change – that is, capitalism – was not being addressed (Building Bridges Collective, 2010). At the conference, Morales made the most radical of all presidential leaders' demands by advocating a one degree Centigrade limit on temperature rises and proposing an international court for climate crimes. He also introduced the concept of climate debt, suggesting that economically advanced countries compensate developing countries that bear the brunt of climate change whilst emitting minimal carbon emissions (Shultz, 2010). Like Choquehuanca, Morales has advocated *vivir bien* as an alternative development model. For instance, at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in 2008, Morales issued a number of commandments to 'save the planet, humanity and life'. The tenth commandment was '*Vivir Bien*':

Living Well is not to live better at the cost of another. Rather, it is to construct a communitarian socialism in harmony with Mother Earth. (Morales, 2010: 35; original text)

The following year Morales brought together climate justice and anti-neoliberal movements in an alternative climate summit in Bolivia, the Conferencia Mundial de los Pueblos sobre el Cambio Climático y los Derechos de la Madre Tierra (World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth). The Bolivian president declared:

We have two paths: either Pachamama or death. We have two paths: either capitalism dies or Mother Earth dies. Either capitalism lives or Mother Earth lives. Of course, brothers and sisters, we are here for life, for humanity and for the rights of Mother Earth. (cited in Webber, 2011: 156)

Notions of the 'indigenous' MAS Party government as saviours of the climate have garnered a vast amount of symbolic capital for the current administration and its development strategies

amongst environmental advocates and intellectuals.

Such imaginaries have been written into political legislation. For instance, the preamble to the 2009 Constitution establishes the basis of the state as *la búsqueda del vivir bien* (the search for living well) (Asamblea Constituyente, 2008). Environmental rights have been broadened within the Constitution to include the obligation of economic organisations to protect the environment (Art. 312: III), the right of individuals to a healthy environment (Art. 33) and the duty of the state to promote the responsible use and industrialisation of natural resources alongside the preservation of the environment (Art. 9: VI). On 15 October 2012, the government also ratified the Ley Marco de la Madre Tierra y Desarrollo Integral para Vivir Bien (Framework Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well). The law posits *vivir bien* as an alternative model to capitalism that is based on the world-visions of indigenous peoples (Art. 5: II).

State-led resource nationalism gains widespread support by redistributing revenues through social welfare programmes (cf. Postero, 2013). This fits with Vice-President García Linera's alternative, and somewhat less radical, understanding of *vivir bien* as 'managing the tension between the protection of nature and productive development' in order to 'generate public resources that guarantee the population basic minimum conditions' (cited in FOBOMADE, 2011: 129). Rhetoric draws on the Andean world-vision of *vivir bien* but appropriates and modifies its meaning in line with the pursuit of the neo-extractivist development model.

National development, however, does not necessarily match up with the welfare of local communities who bear the burden of environmental and social costs caused by extraction and the construction of major infrastructure (Kohl and Farthing, 2012). Additionally, the MAS's creation of a national identity is 'decidedly Andean' (Postero, 2007b: 21), disclaiming the world-visions of the historically more marginalised lowland indigenous peoples (Canessa, 2006). This echoes Sarah Radcliffe's paper on the application of the development model of *buen vivir* in Ecuador, which argues that although the concept has the potential for radical transformations of mainstream development, legacies of colonialism remain entrenched within the Ecuadorian state and act to 'reproduce postcolonial hierarchies of poverty, difference and exclusion' (Radcliffe, 2012: 248). A further criticism is that state-led nationalism does not distribute decision-making powers to the Bolivian people, leaving the demands for popular sovereignty unfulfilled (cf. Cuba,

2006; Quijano, 2006; Haarstad, 2009).

Nonetheless, Postero argues that *vivir bien* is ‘not just a token rhetorical tool’ as it ‘has sufficient moral and cultural significance such that its insertion into the debate has changed the discursive and material field in which contestations over resources and distribution are occurring’ (Postero, 2013: 90). It is within this climate of the politics of identity that we must situate lowland indigenous narratives that advance the idea that indigenous communities live in conformity with nature.

Demands for Indigenous Territory: Amazonian Identities of the Casa Grande

Mesa (Table) 18, an unofficial working group outside the World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, was instigated by the highland indigenous organisation Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ; National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qollasuyu), which joined forces with social movements and Bolivian intellectuals to disclose the gap between the State’s external rhetoric on capitalism and environmental rights and internal practices of neo-extractivism (Building Bridges Collective, 2010). *Mesa 18* heightened public awareness of the tensions within the government’s development model and reoriented the key language of contention of indigenous political organising towards an emphasis on the ecological. As such, members of CIDOB have linked narratives of indigenous territoriality, and related concepts such as the *casa grande*, with associated claims to environmental sustainability. Just one month after the Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change, the *corregidores* (community leaders) of the TIPNIS declared a state of emergency in response to the government’s proposal to build a road through their TCO. In a public resolution dated 18 May 2010, the importance of the protection of *Madre Tierra*, rather than the Andean concept of *Pachamama*, is repeatedly evoked. The document asserts the intimate connection of indigenous peoples to the environment:

[...] opening this road would present a threat to the lives of the peoples who inhabit the TIPNIS, due to the loss of natural resources and biodiversity upon which Mojeños, Yuracarés and Chimanes sustain their culture and life. (Extraordinary Meeting of Community Leaders of the TIPNIS No. 29, 2010)

Simultaneously, the resolution discredits the propaganda discourses of Morales' government:

[...] our President Evo Morales has constituted himself as the main defender of the rights of indigenous peoples and of the *Madre Tierra* [...] We resolve [...] to declare a state of emergency and immediate and permanent mobilisation in defence of our rights, territorial integrity and the rights of the *Madre Tierra*.

Instead of utilising anti-neoliberal sentiment, the language of *territorio indígena* gains its legitimacy through international legal frameworks, as well as state legislation surrounding indigenous and environmental rights. Indigenous identities are re-constructed in order to resist and undermine dominant knowledges that serve to maintain particular systems of power relations, particularly state control of decisions surrounding resource use and exploitation. Interviewees participating in the Ninth March advanced the following definitions of *territorio* and the *casa grande*:

[as] a titled *territorio* where no one will bother us, where you live in harmony with nature, you have self-determination within that *territorio*, [with] your own authorities, your own government. (Tomás Candia Yusupi, Secretary of Young People of CIDOB, 2 June 2012)

The *casa grande* is where you can live comfortably. It is where, in the first place, you can decide the form of life that you want. This is the *casa grande*, that is offered to you by nature, it gives you traditional medicine, it gives you your daily food [...] This [gestures around] is the fish and the fruit of the forest. So, I think that the *casa grande* invites you to be more respectful of nature and there is a balance between man and nature that you have to respect. (Adolfo Chávez, President of CIDOB, 27 May 2012)

These two statements suggest that indigenous territory holds both a socio-ecological significance (as a harmonious relationship with the immediate natural environment that the indigenous peoples inhabit) and a political significance (as self-determination and autonomy outside state jurisdiction). This connection identifies the preservation of the environment as integral to the wellbeing of indigenous populations, through their livelihood patterns and forms of social reproduction. In doing so, it acts to authenticate further claims to territorial sovereignty over natural resources.

Both associations rely on political legitimacy derived from the definition of territory as communal land with collective forms of property, governance and resource management. The prohibition of individual property or decisions over resource exploitation is said to act as a social mechanism that preserves local ecosystems and biodiversity. The following statement from a TIPNIS community leader on the Ninth March demonstrates this vision:

When the community needs something, we meet and then we know what we are going to do. If we sacrifice a tree, well, we will do it together. That is our life, a way of working, right? We do not destroy it just like that [...] because we know that the day natural resources are finished, we are poor. (Leader of community near River Sécure, personal interview, 14 May 2012)

Therefore, indigenous territorial sovereignty is positioned in contrast to the state's implementation of exploitative development. As such, Adolfo Chávez, the President of CIDOB, stated that 'uncontrolled development brings poverty to our people. For us, it isn't a contribution, it is the destruction of our *casa grande*' (personal interview, 27 May 2012). These notions of the lowland indigenous peoples as 'ecologically noble' are given further credence through national frameworks and government documents, such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the TIPNIS, issued in 2011 by the Ministry of Environment and Water and SERNAP. This report frequently suggests there is an integral relationship between the indigenous peoples inhabiting the TIPNIS and the natural environment concluding that 'road policies, tied to the political extension of hydrocarbon activities, present cumulative negative effects on the environment which, as mentioned, is the fundamental condition for the survival of the adapted indigenous model' (SERNAP – Rumbol, 2011: 7).

Moreover, indigenous territorial sovereignty is positioned as important in relation to global climate change. For instance, during my participation in the Ninth March, indigenous leaders frequently spoke of the TIPNIS as the '*pulmón del mundo*' (lungs of the world) and the '*corazón de agua dulce*' (heart of fresh water) in Bolivia and/or Latin America. Angel Yubanore, the Secretary of Justice and Social Participation for CIDOB, explained in his office in Santa Cruz that the struggle in defence of the TIPNIS was national and international, as 'the defence of the environment isn't just for one sector, global warming isn't going to be for one sector, the warming is worldwide, as is the struggle' (personal interview, 1 March 2012). Furthermore, this

narrative is evident in an early declaration from the TIPNIS stating that the ‘destruction of our territory [from the road] is also an attack upon humanity as a whole because it will aggravate global warming’ (Extraordinary Meeting of Community Leaders of the TIPNIS No. 29, 2010). International conventions and summits have been important spaces to counter the Bolivian government’s use of rhetorical tools such as *Pachamama* and *vivir bien*. In late 2011, members of CIDOB and CONAMAQ attended the UNFCCC in Durban, South Africa, where Chávez and one of the leaders of CONAMAQ, Rafael Quispe, stated that the Bolivian government is ‘*capitalista, extractivista y abusivo*’ (capitalist, extractivist and abusive) (Los Tiempos, 2011).

Fundamentally, the perception of the lowland indigenous as living in balance with their environment acts as a bridging tool for the construction of allegiances, connections and solidarity networks between those defending indigenous territoriality and urban environmental movements. A member of the Campaña en Defensa del TIPNIS (Campaign in Defence of the TIPNIS) declared that ‘for there to be indigenous [people] there must be jungle, there is no jungle without [the indigenous], it works both ways’ (personal interview, 19 January 2011). This echoes the view held by many of the activists that *territorio indígena* is synonymous with an indigenous identity, and as such the destruction of their local environment would be tantamount to cultural ethnocide. A David-and-Goliath tussle is envisioned that positions the indigenous peoples of the TIPNIS as noble saviours of the Amazon standing up to a tyrannical government. For example, at a street protest held by the Cochabamba campaign, a student activist brandished a poster that displayed the TIPNIS inhabitants as the Na’vi species threatened by the mining activities of a colonising power in the 2009 film *Avatar* (Figure 3). The indigenous are portrayed as defending the snakes, birds and trees of the TIPNIS from a bulldozer being driven by Morales, most likely mocking his public praise of the film’s ‘profound show of resistance to capitalism and the struggle for the defence of nature’ (Huffington Post, 2010).

Figure 3. ‘Evotar’: Poster on a Protest March in Defence of the TIPNIS in Cochabamba.



Source: Author's photo

Demands for cancellation of the road project, alongside calls for territorial sovereignty, have evolved and expanded into discussions over the meanings of development, modernity and environmental governance. This has shaped solidarity networks with diverse social movements and individual actors, such as environmentalists, academic-activists, feminists, MAS Party dissidents and self-titled Trotskyites. Consequently, the Ninth March welcomed the participation of all Bolivians (outside political party interests) and was named '*por la defensa de la vida y dignidad, los territorios indígenas, los recursos naturales, la biodiversidad, el medio ambiente, las áreas protegidas, el cumplimiento de la Constitución Política del Estado, y el respeto de la democracia*' (in defence of life and dignity, indigenous territories, natural resources, biodiversity, the environment, protected areas, compliance with the State Constitution and respect for democracy). The creation of common identities and grievances is an important component in the legitimisation of contemporary indigenous struggles. Therefore, the notion of the marchers as ecologically minded peoples was actively reproduced. For instance, the marchers were criticised on the Eighth March for the amount of litter they discarded at each camping ground. On the Ninth March the leaders were careful to announce a fifteen-minute cleaning-up slot before setting off from each site (personal field notes).

In many cases, however, these standardised indigenous identities deny the full potential of political demands. Bolivian academics, media and activists often portray the indigenous as maintaining an alternative world-vision to capitalist models of development. For instance, the Bolivian sociologist Raúl Prada has stated that the indigenous marches in defence of the TIPNIS are a clear demonstration against ‘the compulsion of extractive development attached to the modernist illusion of wealth and consumption’ (Prada, 2012: 160). Yet many indigenous peoples and communities actively seek development. For instance, the platform of demands of the Ninth March included calls for the construction and implementation of community development models according to the vision and self-determination of the indigenous, the recognition of community organisations as actors in the mineral and hydrocarbon sectors and the right for communities to benefit from the revenues from extractive industries (personal field notes). Nevertheless, internal tensions exist within CIDOB and the TIPNIS over issues of land and resource sovereignties. Conversations on the Ninth March revealed disagreements about the types of development people desire for the TIPNIS. In particular, the marchers differed over whether hydrocarbons should be exploited or not and whether indigenous peoples in TCOs should be able to capture additional economic revenues from hydrocarbon exploitation in their territories (personal field notes). Unsurprisingly, these tensions were silenced in public discourses.

At certain times, the government has manipulated essentialised indigenous identities to refute claims to greater autonomy and self-determination. Ley No. 180 described the TIPNIS as an ‘*intangible*’ (untouchable) zone, which would prohibit even inhabitants of the park from using its natural resources. As such, members of CIDOB viewed the law as a modest victory that on the one hand would cancel the road project but, on the other, would mean that community development initiatives already operational within the TIPNIS, such as cacao production and caiman hunting, would be suspended. Furthermore, García Linera has countered claims of the TIPNIS being an unspoilt territory, or *pulmón del mundo*, citing allegations of illegal timber sales by representatives of the park, such as President of the TIPNIS Sub-central, Fernando Vargas, and ex-President of CIDOB, Marcial Fabricano. García Linera thus argues that the TIPNIS is a ‘*un pulmón horadado por la extracción ilegal de madera y cuero, un pulmón con cáncer por la nicotina*’ (a lung pierced by the illegal extraction of wood and leather, a lung with cancer from nicotine) (García Linera, 2012:35). The idealisation of lowland indigenous peoples as living in harmonious balance with nature can therefore limit the pursuit of wider political objectives.

Alternative Demands for Popular Sovereignty of the People

Finally, there is the demand for *soberanía popular del pueblo* pursued by movements on the political 'Left'. This vision postulates a reworking of the nation-state from liberal forms of representative democracy to collective forms of decision-making in a self-governing society (Máiz, 2008). The principle of popular sovereignty requires that state authority be determined by the political consent of the people. Urban movements and activists in defence of the TIPNIS have promoted this form of resource sovereignty, which has become a bone of contention in solidarity networks with CIDOB.

Tensions were evident in a meeting in Puerto San Borja to decide the platform of demands for the Ninth March. A heated discussion arose over discussion point four, *Tierra, Territorio y Madre Tierra* (Land, Territory and Mother Earth). Conversation quickly turned to natural resource governance, with little reference to the protection of the environment or biodiversity. Indigenous representatives from CIDOB and the TIPNIS specified their desire for greater economic rights over their lands and resources, arguing that the government must be the one to guarantee these jurisdictional rights for the indigenous peoples. The agenda focused around the right to self-determination, namely the right to decide their own forms of development through their respective decision-making structures and the right to prior consultation over projects initiated by the state or international corporations. However, representatives from the highland indigenous organisation CONAMAQ were much more vocal about the need to sustain the harmonious balance between humans and nature, arguing that neither state-led nor foreign-led capital would be acceptable as long as neo-extractivism continued. These debates between the indigenous marchers provoked a response from one of the urban activists, a so-called 'MAS dissident', who argued that the indigenous cannot be the only ones to decide the future of natural resources, because national development is in the interest of all Bolivians. Rather, reiterating calls for popular sovereignty, he argued that the whole country has the right to communal development. Furthermore, he asserted the right of urban solidarity movements to be involved in the debates since the TIPNIS is a national protected area and therefore of concern to all Bolivians (personal field notes). It is important to note, though, that indigenous groups have rarely made explicit demands for territorial enclosure, instead demanding political representation and participation in the state through their respective organisational structures.

Conclusions

Several competing resource sovereignty claims were made during the TIPNIS conflict. Relying on legitimacy politics, notions of indigeneity have been coupled with identities based on environmental harmony in the formation of *both* state-led resource nationalism *and* demands for indigenous territoriality by the Amazonian indigenous peoples. The active praxis of eco-politics renegotiates the power relations embedded within indigenous–state interactions, as well as authenticating resource sovereignty claims amongst the wider Bolivian populace.

The importance of the issues discussed in this article is underlined by the rise in indigenous nationalisms being played out within the Latin American region alongside the pursuit of neo-extractive development models. State-led resource nationalism has in some cases aggravated land and resource struggles. In Bolivia, the monopolisation of indigenous identity-making by the government has become a sticking point in the plurinational agenda. A fuller process of decolonising the nation-state would need to encompass plural understandings of development, nature, democracy and territoriality through the self-determination of indigenous populations. Until this occurs, the state will continue to play out colonial relations of domination that politically, economically and culturally marginalise certain sectors of the indigenous population.

Questions therefore remain over whether and how individual and communal interests can be reconciled and how indigenous peoples can be incorporated as active citizens within Bolivia. However, as Gustafson (2009) aptly points out, plurinationalism is a process, rather than an established model. This process will be shaped by resource conflicts in the years to come. For now, though, in the lead-up to the 2014 presidential elections where Morales will run for a third term, the government has taken the decision to suspend the road project through the TIPNIS.

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